

WITCHES

4 OF 5

VERTIGO

FABLES

WILLINGHAM
BUCKINGHAM
LEIALOHA
PEPOY

No.

11



Jan '10

suggested for
mature readers
vertigocomics.com

SOME DAYS PAST...

TRUE, HE
READS, BUT HE'S
NO STUFFY-HEADED
ACADEMIC.

NOT *THIS*
MONKEY.

BUFKIN
COMES FROM A
MILITARY BACKGROUND.
HE WAS ONCE PART OF
ANOTHER WITCH'S AIR
FORCE—HER ELITE
**SHOCK
TROOPS.**

OZMA

CHAPTER FOUR OF WITCHES

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HE'S TRAINED,
EXPERIENCED, AND KNOWS
HOW TO TRANSFORM BOOK LEARN-
ING INTO DEADLY PRACTICAL
APPLICATIONS.

HIS WRATH
IS SLOW TO WAKEN,
BUT **TERRIBLE**
TO BEHOLD.



YOU SCREWED UP **BADLY** WHEN YOU BACKED HIM INTO A CORNER.

IF YOU LIKE, BABA YAGA, I COULD RECORD YOUR LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

OTHER THAN THAT, I CAN'T BE OF MUCH FURTHER HELP TO YOU.



I'M NOT ACCUSTOMED TO BEING SPOKEN TO IN SUCH AN **INSOLENT** MANNER!



I IMAGINE NOT. BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ME? SMASH ME AGAIN? GIVE THAT ANOTHER TRY, LADY. **REALLY** GO TO TOWN THIS TIME. SEE IF IT TAKES.



WAY BACK WHEN I BELONGED TO THE SNOW QUEEN, I WAS ONCE SMASHED SO THOROUGHLY THAT TINY SHARDS OF ME SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.



AND YOU DON'T **EVEN** WANT TO KNOW WHAT ANOTHER WITCH DID TO ME, WHEN I'D GIVE HER NEWS SHE DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR.

AND YET, HERE I AM AGAIN, NEW, CLEAN, AND UNBLEMISHED. I'LL ALWAYS REPAIR. THEY REALLY KNEW THEIR **MAGIC** BACK THEN.



THEY STILL KNEW HOW TO **BUILD** THINGS WHEN THEY MADE ME.

BUT TO GET BACK TO THE SUBJECT, YOU'D BEST FIND A PLACE TO HIDE, OLD CRONE, BECAUSE, SURE AS TICKS ON A DEER, BUFGIN IS COMING TO **GET** YOU.

BAH! STUFF AND NONSENSE!



THE FARM.

TODAY.

NO, I DON'T *THINK* IT'S GOING TO RAIN AGAIN TODAY, BECAUSE IT'S GOING TO SNOW INSTEAD. MARK MY WORDS.

CAN WE *PLEASE* STOP TALKING ABOUT THE WEATHER, OR THE TEPID COFFEE, OR ANY OTHER INCIDENTAL, AND SETTLE DOWN TO BUSINESS?

FINE.

YOU CALLED THE MEETING, OZMA. BY ALL MEANS, PROCEED.

THANK YOU, HONORED PROSPERO.


TOTENKINDER IS GONE, AWAY FROM THE FARM. ENTIRELY OFF THE MUNDY WORLD IN FACT.

SHE LEFT WITHOUT WARNING. NO HINT OF HER INTENTIONS, NO WORD ON HOW LONG SHE MIGHT BE AWAY, NOR ANY *INSTRUCTIONS* OF WHAT TO DO IN HER ABSENCE.



MOST OF OUR RULES ARE INFORMAL, TRUSTING IN LONG CUSTOM RATHER THAN WRITTEN LAW, TO GUIDE THE INTRICACIES OF OUR AFFAIRS.

BUT BY ANY STANDARDS, WHAT FRAU TOTENKINDER HAS DONE CONSTITUTES ABANDONMENT OF HER POST, IN A TIME OF EXTREME DANGER TO US, AS WELL AS THE LARGER FABLE COMMUNITY.



DOES ANYONE *DISPUTE* MY EVALUATION OF THE SITUATION?



ANYONE AT ALL?


UHM...



IF WE ONLY *KNEW* WHY SHE LEFT--

EXACTLY. IF SHE'D HAD THE BASIC COURTESY TO *INFORM* US-- ANY OF US. IF WE KNEW WHY SHE ABANDONED HER DUTY, WE MIGHT HAVE MORE FACTS ON WHICH TO BASE OUR DECISION.

BUT SHE DIDN'T ALLOW US THAT *GRACE*, DID SHE?



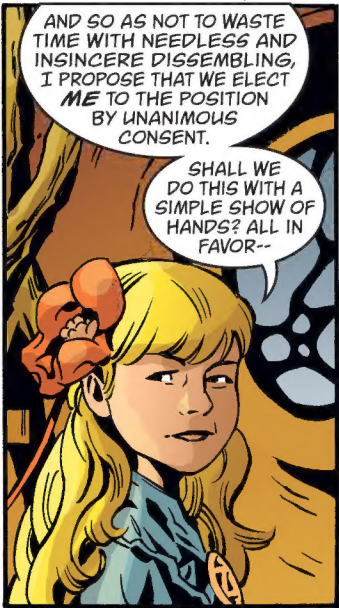
OUR DECISION TO DO WHAT, OZMA? WHAT *EXACTLY* DO YOU HAVE IN MIND?

SINCE A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP WAS BOTH IMMINENT AND INEVITABLE ANYWAY, I JUDGE IT BEST UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES TO *EXPEDITE* IT.



REALLY?
HOW SOON WERE
YOU--?

NOW, MR.
KADABRA. I THINK
WE SHOULD PROCEED
WITH THE VOTE
NOW.



AND SO AS NOT TO WASTE
TIME WITH NEEDLESS AND
INSINCERE DISSEMBLING,
I PROPOSE THAT WE ELECT
ME TO THE POSITION
BY UNANIMOUS
CONSENT.

SHALL WE
DO THIS WITH A
SIMPLE SHOW OF
HANDS? ALL IN
FAVOR--



HOLD ON A
MOMENT!

PLEASE.

TO RUSH
AHEAD ON SO
IMPORTANT
A MATTER, SO
QUICKLY--



MR. GRANDOURS IS RIGHT.
WE DON'T **NORMALLY** RACE
ALONG LIKE THIS. WE'RE
IMMORTALS AFTER
ALL.

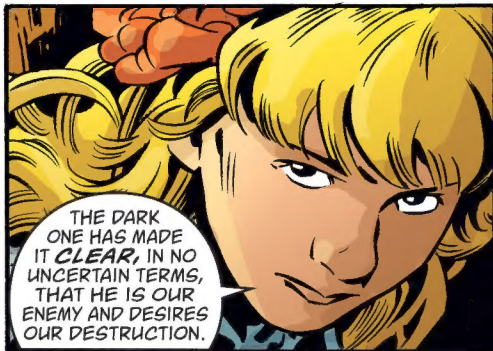


THE NEED
FOR HASTE IS
A **MUNDY**
QUALITY.

TRUE.
WE'VE TIME TO
CONSIDER--TO
PONDER OUR
OPTIONS.



DO
WE?

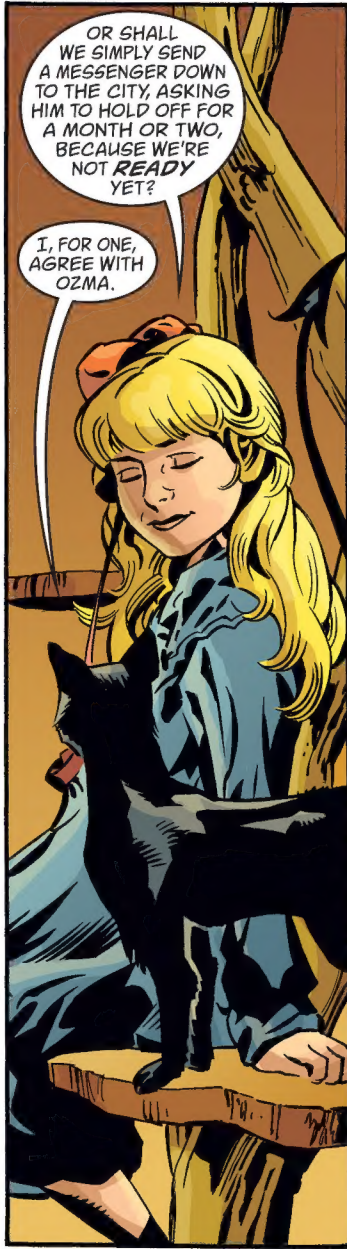


THE DARK
ONE HAS MADE
IT **CLEAR**, IN NO
UNCERTAIN TERMS,
THAT HE IS OUR
ENEMY AND DESIRES
OUR DESTRUCTION.



WE NEED TO DEVISE A STRATEGY TO DEFEND AGAINST HIM, AND EVENTUALLY **DESTROY** HIM, AND WE NEED TO DO SO BEFORE HE MOVES AGAINST US.

THAT SHOULD MERIT **SOME** MEASURE OF URGENCY, DON'T YOU AGREE?



OR SHALL WE SIMPLY SEND A MESSENGER DOWN TO THE CITY, ASKING HIM TO HOLD OFF FOR A MONTH OR TWO, BECAUSE WE'RE NOT **READY** YET?

I, FOR ONE, AGREE WITH OZMA.



WE NEED TO ACT NOW, RATHER THAN LATER. WE CAN'T **AFFORD** TO WAIT AND SEE WHEN AND IF TOTENKINDER DEIGNS TO RETURN.

LET'S PUT OZMA IN CHARGE BECAUSE SHE'S ALREADY WAY OUT IN FRONT ON THIS SITUATION.

SHE'S ALREADY DETERMINED THAT DEFEATING THE DARK ONE WILL BE HER GREAT UNDERTAKING AS OUR LEADER.



GODS **KNOW** THAT I DON'T WANT THE BURDEN ON **MY** SHOULDERS.

ANYONE ELSE DISAGREE? OR IS THERE ANOTHER AMONG US WHO DESIRES THE LEADERSHIP?



NO?



THEN I THINK IT'S TIME TO PUT IT TO A VOTE.

ELSEWHERE
ON THE FARM...

I
KNOW
YOU, OLD
MAN.

YOU'RE THE
GRANDFATHER OAK,
THE PATRIARCH OF ALL
TREES IN THESE WOODS,
AND IN OTHERS BEYOND
TOO, I SUSPECT.

THERE'S
PRECIOUS LITTLE
MAGIC IN THE TREES OF
THIS MISERABLE WORLD,
BUT WHAT SCANT MEASURE
THERE IS FLOWS ENTIRELY
INTO *YOU*, DOESN'T
IT?

AND
THOSE
SMALL BITS
ADD UP,
DON'T
THEY?

YOU'RE A POWERFUL
ONE. I MAY NOT BE THE
MOST GIFTED SORCERER WHO
EVER LIVED, BUT I KNOW MY
ARBOREAL MAGIC. YES
I DO.

What do
you WANT of
me, young
man?

ISN'T IT *OBVIOUS*? I
WANT AN ALLIANCE. I WANT
TO DRAW ON YOUR POWER.
DRINK FROM THE WELL,
SO TO SPEAK.

AND I WANT YOU TO
INTRODUCE ME TO THE
OFFSPRING OF YOUR
MOST ROYAL AND
PUISSANT SAPLING.

FAR AWAY...

FOR DAYS, OR WEEKS, OR PERHAPS MONTHS, WE'VE BEEN SEARCHING THESE ENDLESS CHAMBERS!

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO CHART THE PASSAGE OF TIME, HONORED MOTHER, IN THIS PLACE OF NO SUN OR MOON OR STARS.

WHERE IS THIS CREATURE CALLED THE BUFKIN, WHO INTENDS MY HARM?

OR WHERE IS THE WAY OUT OF HERE? YOU'VE FAILED ME IN EVERY REGARD, RADIANT SUN--YOU AND YOUR UNWORTHY BROTHERS.

IF WE'VE FAILED YOU, THEN STRIKE OFF OUR HEADS. NONE OF US WANTS TO LIVE IN THE CHILL OF YOUR DISFAVOR.

START WITH ME, MOTHER.





STAND UP, YOU DAMNED FOOL. DON'T BE SO *DRAMATIC* ALL THE TIME. *I'LL* BE THE ONE TO DECIDE WHEN YOU'VE EARNED A CHASTISEMENT.

MOTHER, WHAT IS THAT SHADOW THAT SUDDENLY CROSSES YOUR FACE?



HMMM?

WHAT--?



MOTHER!

SCHWAN!





THAT WAS MEANT TO KILL ME!

AND NEARLY DID.

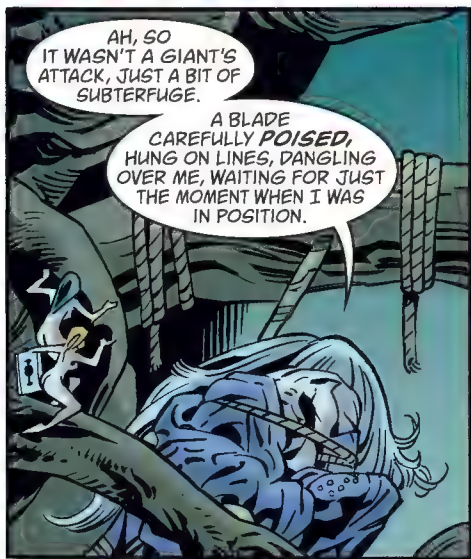


A GIANT BLADE, DROPPED--OR THROWN--FROM ON HIGH. IS THIS BUFIN A GREAT AND CYCLOPEAN MONSTER THEN, TO STRIKE FROM SUCH A VANTAGE?

WE'LL SEE.



OH YES, WE'LL SEE WHAT THERE IS TO SEE.



AH, SO IT WASN'T A GIANT'S ATTACK, JUST A BIT OF SUBTERFUGE.

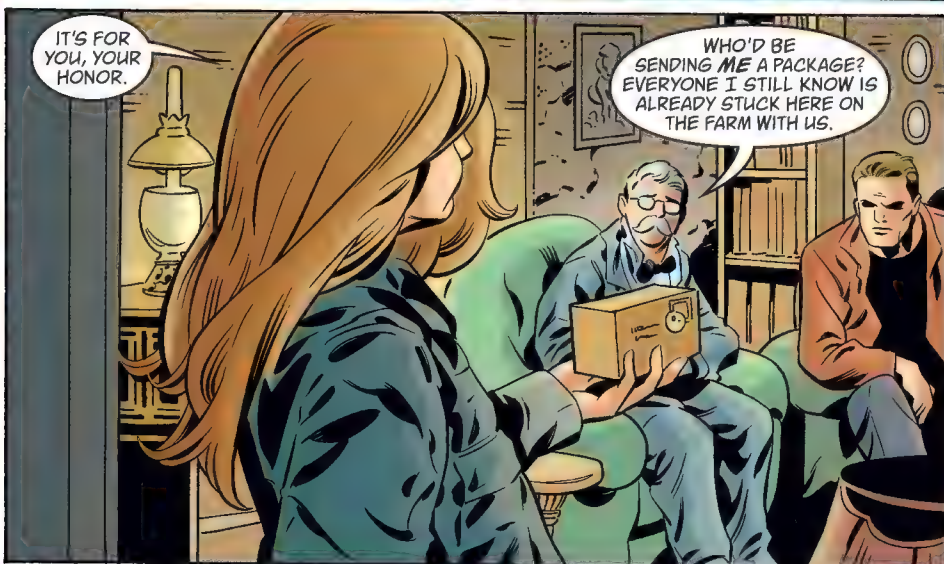
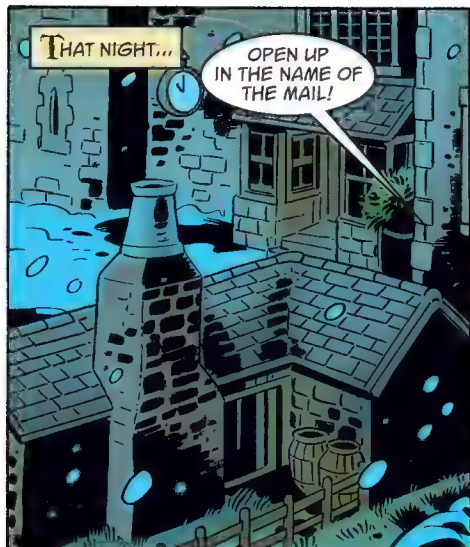
A BLADE CAREFULLY POISED, HUNG ON LINES, DANGLING OVER ME, WAITING FOR JUST THE MOMENT WHEN I WAS IN POSITION.

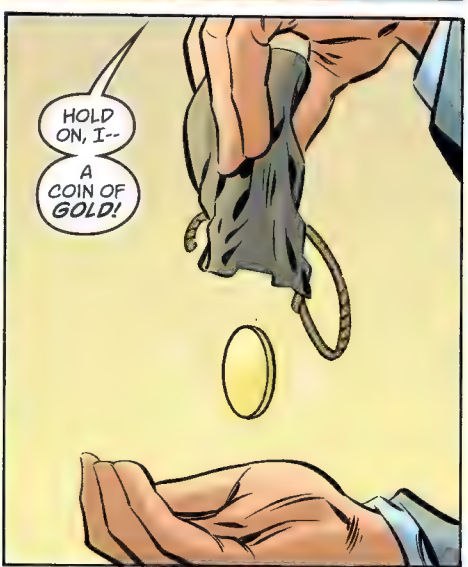
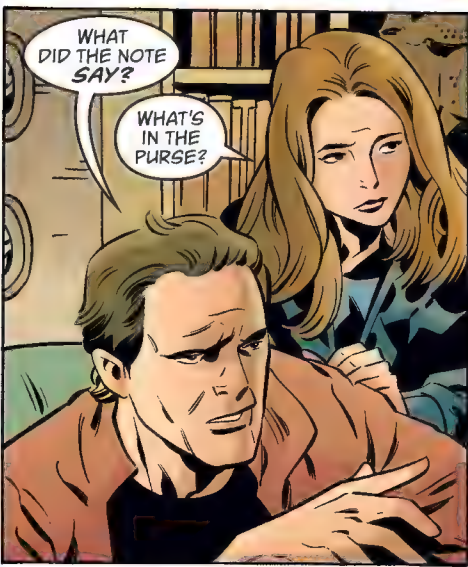
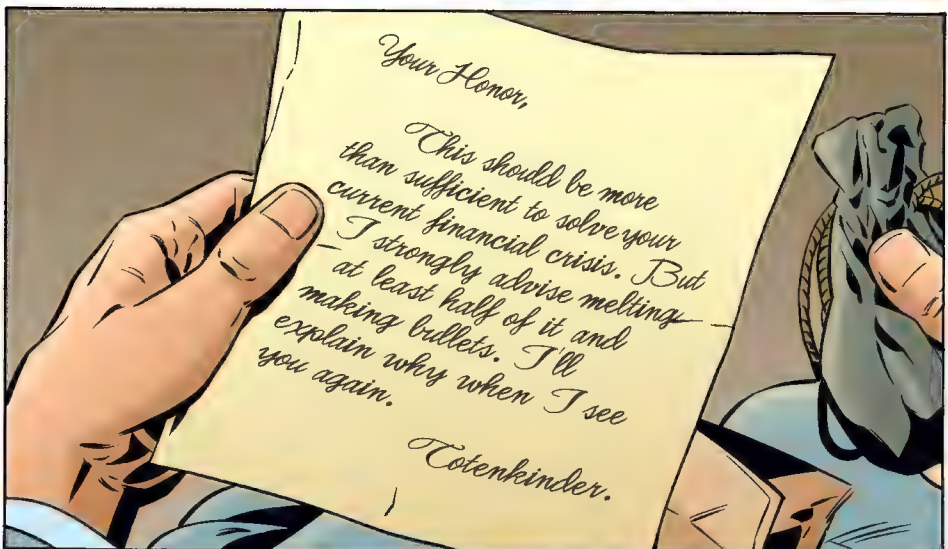


THE LINES CUT TO LET THE WEAPON FALL.

BUT WHO DID THE CUTTING? I DETECT NO GREAT CREATURE LURKING UP HERE. ONLY SMALL, SCRAMBLING THINGS OF NO CONSEQUENCE OR IMPORT.

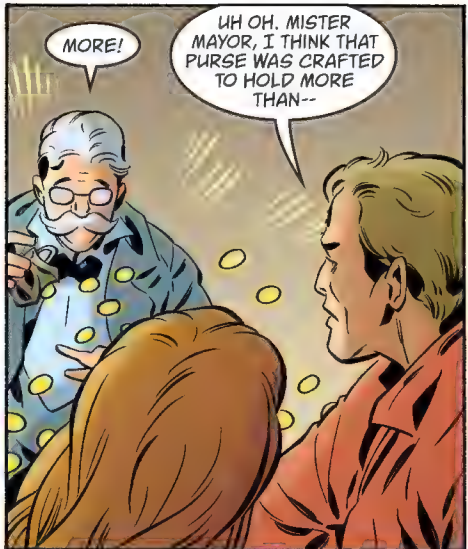
CURIOUS.





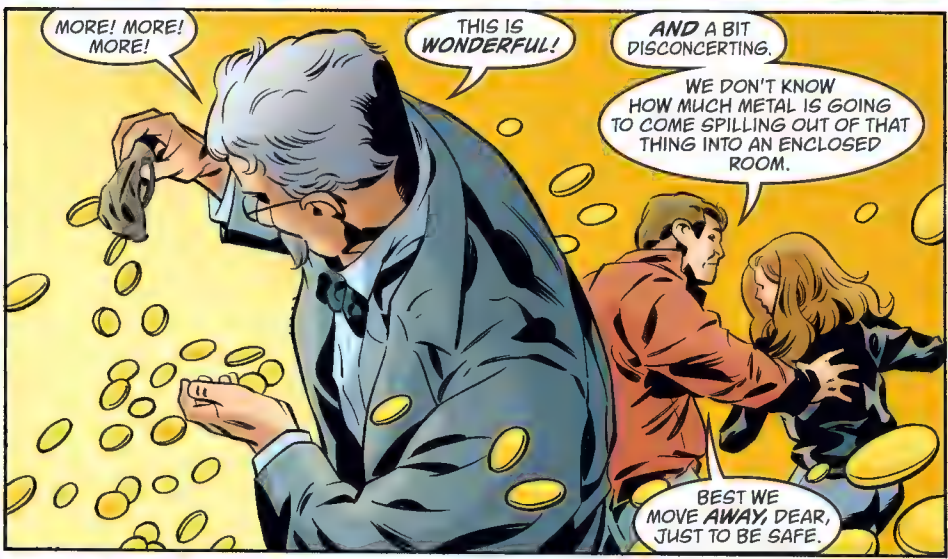


TWO GOLD COINS!



MORE!

UH OH, MISTER MAYOR, I THINK THAT PURSE WAS CRAFTED TO HOLD MORE THAN--



MORE! MORE! MORE!

THIS IS WONDERFUL!

AND A BIT DISCONCERTING.

WE DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH METAL IS GOING TO COME SPILLING OUT OF THAT THING INTO AN ENCLOSED ROOM.

BEST WE MOVE AWAY, DEAR, JUST TO BE SAFE.



OH, YOU WONDERFUL WITCH!



OH, HAPPY DAY!

OH, JOYFUL, FRABULOUS DAY!

AT THAT SAME MOMENT...

OKAY, TROOPS, THAT DIDN'T WORK. ON TO PLAN B.

DO WE HAVE ENOUGH THIMBLES TO GO AROUND? ONE FOR EACH BARLEYCORN GIRL? AND KEROSENE FROM THE OIL LAMPS?

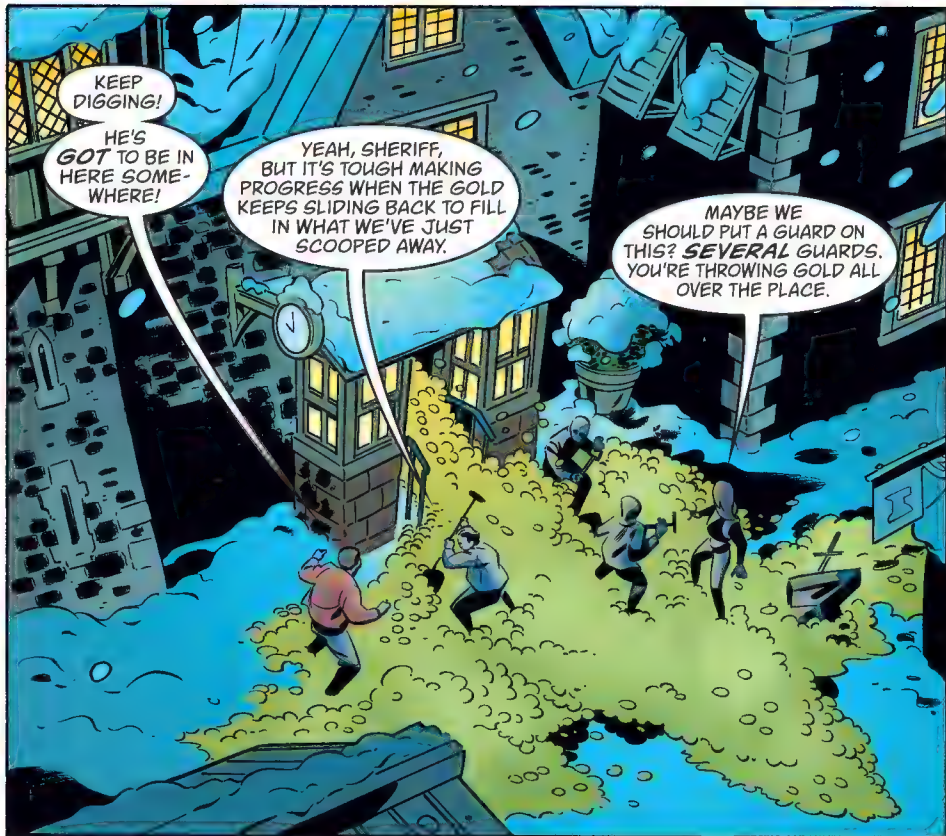
YES INDEED, FEARLESS BOSS MAN.

NOW REMEMBER, LADIES, STEALTH IS *EVERYTHING*, IF WE'RE TO HAVE A HOPE OF SUCCESS. WAIT FOR YOUR OPPORTUNITIES. DON'T TRY TO FORCE IT. TIME IS ON *OUR* SIDE.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO WHILE THEY'RE DOING THAT, BUFKIN?

KEEP BRIEFING THE *NEW* BARLEYCORN GIRLS AS THEY--BLOSSOM? HATCH? BLOOM?--WHATEVER IT IS THEY'RE DOING TO GET BORN.

MEANWHILE, I'LL BE WORKING ON SOME OTHER IDEAS. I STILL THINK THERE'S MORE WE CAN DO WITH THE "DEATH FROM ABOVE" SCENARIO.



KEEP DIGGING!

HE'S GOT TO BE IN HERE SOMEWHERE!

YEAH, SHERIFF, BUT IT'S TOUGH MAKING PROGRESS WHEN THE GOLD KEEPS SLIDING BACK TO FILL IN WHAT WE'VE JUST SCOOPED AWAY.

MAYBE WE SHOULD PUT A GUARD ON THIS? *SEVERAL* GUARDS. YOU'RE THROWING GOLD ALL OVER THE PLACE.



STAND BACK, IT'S SLIDING AGAIN!



I ASK YOU!

IS IT *WRONG* TO BE SO HAPPY, WHEN SO MUCH IS GOING SO BADLY?

IS IT?

THE NEXT DAY...

GOOD MORNING, GENTLE COLLEAGUES.

PLEASE FORGIVE THE EARLY HOUR, BUT I WANTED MY FIRST DAY AS YOUR NEW LEADER TO BE A FULL AND PRODUCTIVE ONE.

OUR FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS SHOULD BE THE MATTER OF INTELLIGENCE. WE DON'T HAVE ANY.

WE KNOW ALMOST NOTHING OF OUR NEW ADVERSARY. I THINK WE SHOULD CORRECT THAT BY CONSTRUCTING A WEB OF DETECTION SPELLS, PASSIVE ONES ONLY AT FIRST.

THIS DARK MAN IS RADIATING ALL MANNER OF ENERGY--A MAGIC FIELD STRONG ENOUGH THAT IT EVEN REACHES US UP HERE, WITH DISTURBING RESULTS.

THE VIOLENT INCIDENT BETWEEN THE WOLF AND THE BEAST BEING THE OBVIOUS EXAMPLE.

LET'S EXAMINE THAT MAGIC FIELD. MEASURE IT, AND BREAK IT DOWN TO ITS COMPONENT PARTS, IF POSSIBLE. EXPLORE ITS NATURE AND QUALITIES.

THAT'S A GOOD START, BUT NO AMOUNT OF PASSIVE EVALUATION WILL MAKE UP FOR HARD FACTS. BUT IT SEEMS WE CAN'T EVEN GET A LOOK AT OUR ENEMY.

TRUE. MRS. FINCH NEVER RETURNED.

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THAT. MADDY, WOULD YOU CARE TO TAKE A WALK WITH ME? TAKE IN THE BRISK MORNING AIR?

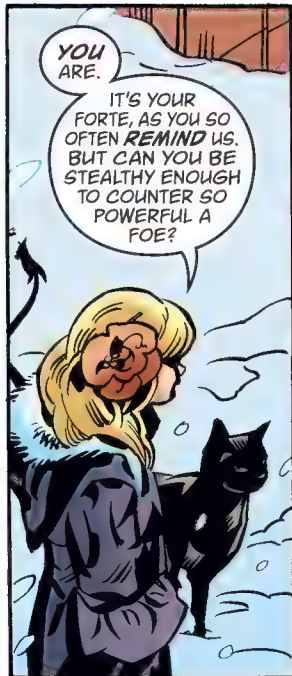
IN THE SNOW? OH BOUNDLESS JOY.



THEIR MISTAKE WAS IN USING **MUNDANE** METHODS IN WHAT IS CLEARLY A MAGIC STRUGGLE.

MRS. FINCH MAY HAVE BEEN HARD TO NOTICE IN AN ORDINARY SENSE, BUT SHE WASN'T SPELL PROTECTED. SHE WASN'T **MAGICALLY** STEALTHY.

OUCH. HERE IT COMES.



YOU ARE.

IT'S YOUR FORTE, AS YOU SO OFTEN **REMINDE** US. BUT CAN YOU BE STEALTHY ENOUGH TO COUNTER SO POWERFUL A FOE?



I HESITATE TO RISK YOU IF THERE'S EVEN THE **SLIGHTEST** CHANCE HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO PERCEIVE YOU.

OZMA, AT THE RISK OF TOOTING MY OWN HORN, THERE'S NO POWER ON THIS OR **ANY** WORLD THAT CAN NOTICE ME, ONCE I'VE DECIDED I DON'T WANT TO BE NOTICED.



I'M NO MRS. FINCH. YOU NEED EYES ON THE GROUND, AND THAT'S MY GREATEST OF SO **MANY** AREAS OF EXPERTISE.

THEN PLEASE GO DOWN INTO THE CITY AND SEE WHAT YOU CAN SEE. BUT BE CAREFUL.



I JUST WISH I DIDN'T HAVE TO FLY IN THE SNOW.

I REALLY HATE COLD CLIMES. I MISS THE MEDITERRANEAN, OR MY TROPICAL ISLAND.

HUH?

AT WOLF MANOR, LATER THAT SAME DAY...

KING COLE'S NOT GOING TO LIKE IT, BUT I THINK WE SHOULD TAKE FRAU TOTENKINDER'S SUGGESTION SERIOUSLY.

SNOWFORT!
A HUGE ONE!
THREE STORIES HIGH!

I AGREE, BIGBY. I'VE LEARNED TO TRUST HER WISDOM. WE SHOULD TREAT WHAT SHE SAID AS HOLY WRIT. COMMANDMENTS FROM THE MOUNTAINTOP.

THEN YOU BREAK THE BAD NEWS TO HIS HONOR, SHERIFF, WHILE I SEE ABOUT SETTING UP A GOLD MELTING AND CASTING FACILITY.

AND THEN WHAT?

THEN I'M GOING TO FORM A RIFLE COMPANY FROM THE BEST OF OUR WAR VETERANS, INCLUDING THE CREAM OF OUR OLD SNIPER DETACHMENT.

GOOD IDEA. BEST NOT TO EVER GET CLOSE TO THAT THING, IF WE CAN HELP IT. SHOOTING HIM FROM A DISTANCE APPEALS TO ME.


CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS. SINCE ALL INDICATIONS ARE THIS WILL BE A SUICIDE MISSION, WE CAN'T IN GOOD CONSCIENCE PRESS THEM INTO SERVICE.

AND THEN WE TRAIN THEM HARDER THAN EVER.

NO ONE WILL LOVE THAT. HOW DO WE MOTIVATE ANYONE TO SIGN ON?

EASY. I'LL SWEET-TALK THE DIRECTOR OF HOMELAND RECOVERY INTO OFFERING AN IRRESISTIBLE INCENTIVE.

BIGBY'S ALREADY WORKING UP A SCHEME TO ALLOW SOME OF OUR SECOND GENERATION FABLES TO START RECOVERY OPERATIONS ON A FEW SELECTED WORLDS. LET'S USE THAT.

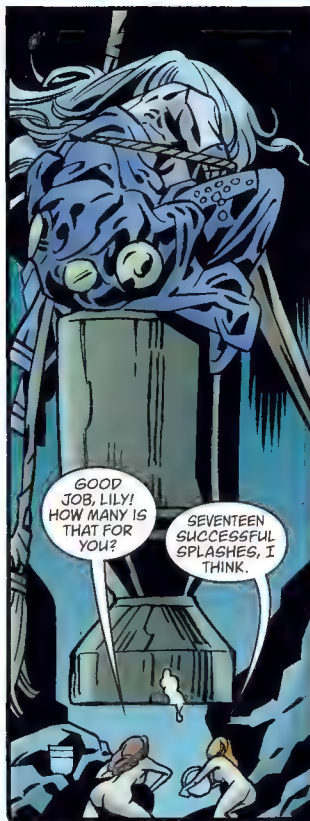
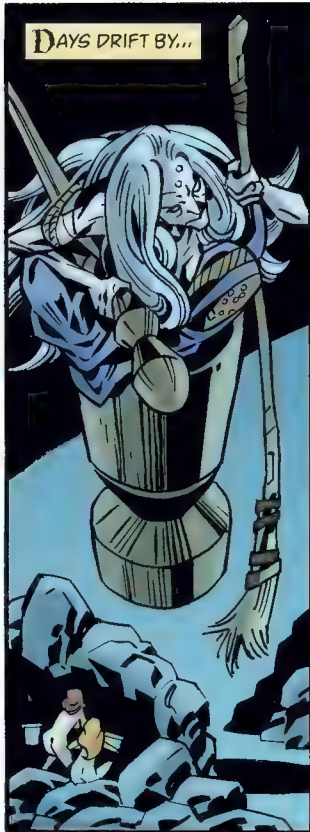


"THOSE WHO SURVIVE GET TO KEEP THEIR ARMS, WHICH IS WHAT THEY'VE BEEN WHINING ABOUT SINCE THE WAR ENDED."

"THEN WE EQUIP THEM FOR A FULL EXPEDITION INTO ONE OF THE HOMELANDS WORLDS THAT BIGBY HAS ALREADY IDENTIFIED AS A GOOD POSSIBILITY FOR RECOVERY. BASICALLY WE TURN THEM LOOSE TO CARVE OUT A NEW KINGDOM OR TWO."

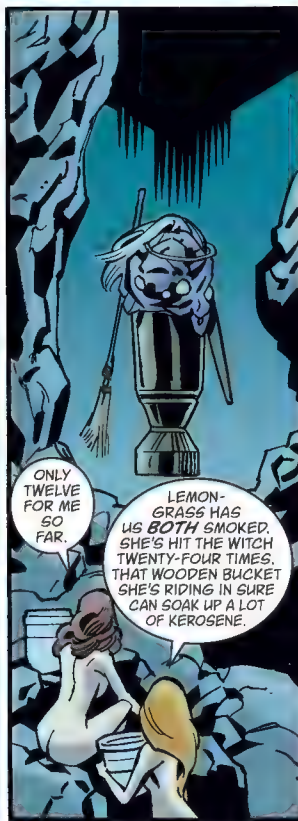
"LAND FOR SERVICE IS A TIME-HONORED TRADITION."

DAYS DRIFT BY...



GOOD JOB, LILY! HOW MANY IS THAT FOR YOU?

SEVENTEEN SUCCESSFUL SPLASHES, I THINK.



ONLY TWELVE FOR ME SO FAR.

LEMON-GRASS HAS US BOTH SMOKED. SHE'S HIT THE WITCH TWENTY-FOUR TIMES. THAT WOODEN BUCKET SHE'S RIDING IN SURE CAN SOAK UP A LOT OF KEROSENE.



WELL, A LOT BY *OUR* SCALE, BUT NOT SO MUCH BY *HERS*. WE'VE GOT A WAY TO GO BEFORE THAT THING IS READY FOR A MATCH. **PATIENCE, DEAR, PATIENCE.**



MORE DAYS PASS...

IT'S TIME TO DO YOUR WORK WITH MORE VIGOR, MY WITHERINGS. I WANT AT LEAST ONE HALL FINISHED, WITH A ROOF TO COVER IT.

AS LOATH AS I AM TO CONFIN MYSELF IN ANY SORT OF BOX, I'M GROWING TIRED OF SITTING IN THE COLD, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.

I WISH ANOTHER FABLE WOULD RETURN, TO BREAK THE MONOTONY.

WHERE ARE THEY? HOW CAN THEY ABIDE SO LONG ON THE RUN, WITHOUT EVEN AN ATTEMPT TO PROTECT THEIR HOME?

HAVE THEY NO COURAGE? NO FIRE IN THEIR COLLECTIVE BELLY?

AND VAST WORLDS DISTANT...



Knock
Knock



HELLO?

ARE YOU
DUNSTER HAPP,
COMMANDER OF THE
BOXERS?



THERE'S
NO SUCH THING AS
THE BOXERS, LITTLE
GIRL.

AND IF THERE EVER WERE,
THEY'D HAVE DISBANDED NOW
THAT THE EMPIRE'S FALLEN. AFTER
ALL, A BROTHERHOOD DEDICATED
TO SERVICE NEEDS SOMETHING
TO SERVE.

THEY EXISTED ALL
RIGHT, AND YOU WERE
THEIR LEADER. MY NAME
IS BELLFLOWER, AND I'D
LIKE YOU TO INVITE
ME IN.



I WANT YOU TO TEACH
ME HOW TO CONSTRUCT
A BOX TO HOLD THE
DARK MAN.



NEXT: OUT OF THE WOODS!

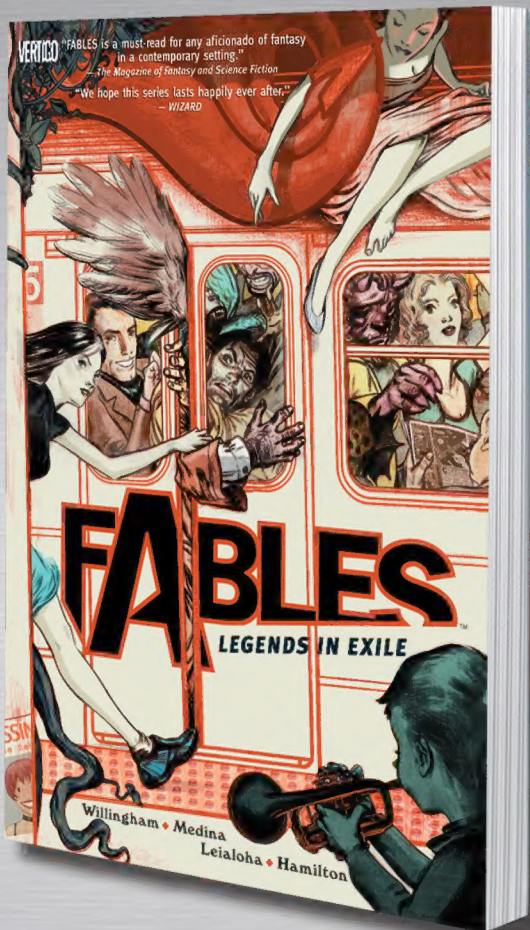
"FABLES is an excellent series in the tradition of SANDMAN, one that rewards careful attention and loyalty." – ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

BILL WILLINGHAM

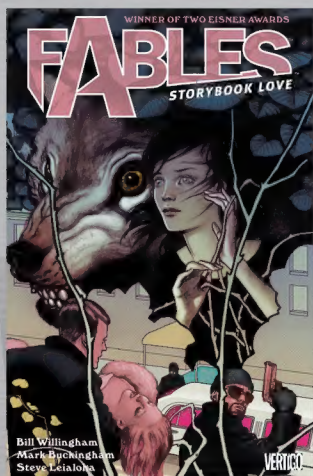
"[A] wonderfully twisted concept... features fairy tale characters banished to the noirish world of present-day New York."
– THE WASHINGTON POST



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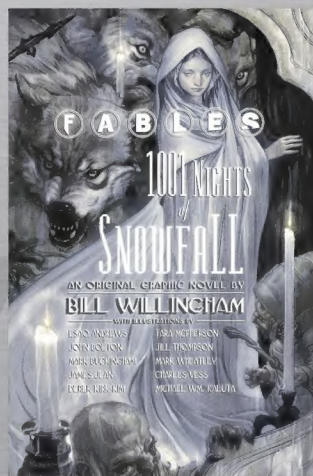
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